

Helen Keller

BOOTH, ALICE

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America's
Twelve Greatest Women

HELEN KELLER

A Living Proof of the Divine Spark in the Human Brain

By Alice Booth

This is the fourth portrait and biography in Good Housekeeping's series of America's most distinguished women. Each month hereafter a portrait will be reproduced until the series of twelve is concluded. Announcement of the prize-winning letters from our readers appears on page 108 of this issue

AT NINETEEN months, illness locked the child that was Helen Keller in a sightless, soundless cage. She was blind, she was deaf. Her baby lips had learned only a few words. She knew discomfort, and a few primitive needs, but had only a cry to express them. She knew the comfort of her mother's presence—tenaciously, day after day, she followed her mother about the house, held to her skirts . . .

In the midst of a happy family life, she was alone in a great silence. Under the blazing southern sun, she walked groping in the never-changing darkness. Had she thoughts beyond the ordinary human hungers? Impossible—for after all, we think in words, however faulty they may be, however inadequate to express our greatest emotions, our loftiest aspirations. And she knew no words. And no one could teach her any words, for she could not hear. . . .

Yesterday, I called on Helen Keller. A smiling woman came to meet me—erect, poised, animated. We shook hands, and she spoke to me in greeting—yes, spoke. Her voice was forced, breathy—but it was a voice—and her shining eyes and quick smile more than recompensed for its deficiencies.

I could not believe that she was blind. Her eyes are clear, wide-open, with the happy innocence of a child's. They are a vivid, shining blue that fairly glows with excitement.

We sat down to talk—her secretary at her side.

I had expected to pity her inability to communicate with me. I was wrong. She was perfectly able to express herself. She talked in a stream, words fairly tumbling from her lips in her haste and eagerness, while into the hand of her secretary she was constantly spelling words and thoughts—more words and thoughts. It was I who sat apart, unable to communicate with her, unable to meet this rapid brain except through the interpretation of Miss Thomson's hand spelling into hers.

I had thought our conversation would be slow, labored, difficult. But it raced.

And again I could not believe that Helen Keller was blind. Her face was animated by a hundred changing shades and fancies. There was in it none of the blank patience and endurance that mark the countenances of most blind people. She smiled—she laughed—easily, naturally, a charming laugh. She was never still—tapping her feet on the floor; bouncing up and down a bit on the deep-cushioned sofa, as a child does

when it is happy; nodding, smiling, turning her head from one of us to the other; capping some deft sally with a playful pat of her hand on my arm.

We were gay, over the tea-cups—a little interlude in the work with which Helen Keller's life is filled. She is not an idle person. Her working day is longer than the law allows in offices and factories.

Since her sophomore year in college she has written seven books—one of them, "The Story of My Life," in the best-seller class; it has sold over a hundred thousand copies. Her work for the blind is incessant in its demands—for them she is constantly writing, speaking, appealing. Her heart is full of sorrow for them—for they have so much less than she has, she says. And always she is reading, studying. It is almost impossible to tell Helen Keller a new fact—she has heard them all already, and from people like Einstein, and Mark Twain, and Alexander Graham Bell, and Edison and Burbank and Andrew Carnegie.

Hers is a life remarkable in its power and influence among the finest minds of the day. Her accomplishments are outstanding even in a seeing, hearing, speaking world. Yet every one of them is made in the blackness of endless night, where no whisper ever breaks the eternal silence.

Surely humanity, uninspired by any God above, could never have torn away the barriers that imprisoned her.

At six Helen Keller had not changed much in intelligence from the baby of nineteen months. She knew the primitive hungers and expressed them by incoherent wails. She had of her own accord invented signs for eating and for drinking, and used them in need. Most pathetic of all, she had invented a sign for her mother—a touch on the cheek—which signified her want of her mother on the rare occasions when she was separated from her.

Her childish hands were constantly touching, feeling, investigating, prying. The garden of the Keller home in sunny Alabama was surrounded by a clipped box hedge, and inside that enclosure Helen groped her way. She found the flowers by their scent—but no one could tell her their names or their colors. One instinct—old as the race—persisted in this deaf and dumb and blind child. She had a doll—she loved her doll.

Even then a vague feeling came to her that she was different. She used to come (Continued on page 275)

Illustrated by
Nelson Grofe

Dr. Henry Smith Williams

Tells the Fascinating Story
Of the Evolution Of
Bird Costumes

you are not likely to mistake him for any other bird when you see him thus perched. And we know, of course, that the shrike's object is to spy out some smaller bird on which it can pounce.

But how could the chickadee be expected to know this? The shrike is a rare bird hereabouts. We see at most one or two in a season. More than likely these chickadees had never seen their enemy before. How could they recognize him as an enemy, and how did they know that their best defense would be to sit perfectly still, facing the enemy, instead of dashing for some place of shelter?

The answer, of course, is that for thousands of years shrikes have been mortal enemies of chickadees. Millions of chickadees have fallen before the cruel hooked bill of the shrike. Any chickadee that attempted to escape a shrike by direct flight was inevitably lost. Chickadees that were perhaps too petrified with fear to move were overlooked, and escaped—and thus survived to perpetuate their species and transmit their individual traits. Ultimately the instinctive tendency of every chickadee to react to the presence of a shrike as we saw our chickadees react this morning became as much a part of the mental equipment of every fledgling as the instinct to search for particular kinds of food.

"But even so," said Felicia, when we discussed the matter in this vein—"even so, it seems strange that the little chaps should face the enemy; for of course their object is to become as nearly invisible as possible, and one would think that their black and white heads must be the most clearly visible part of them. Would they not be safer if they turned their gray backs toward the shrike?"

"The chickadees have virtually an-

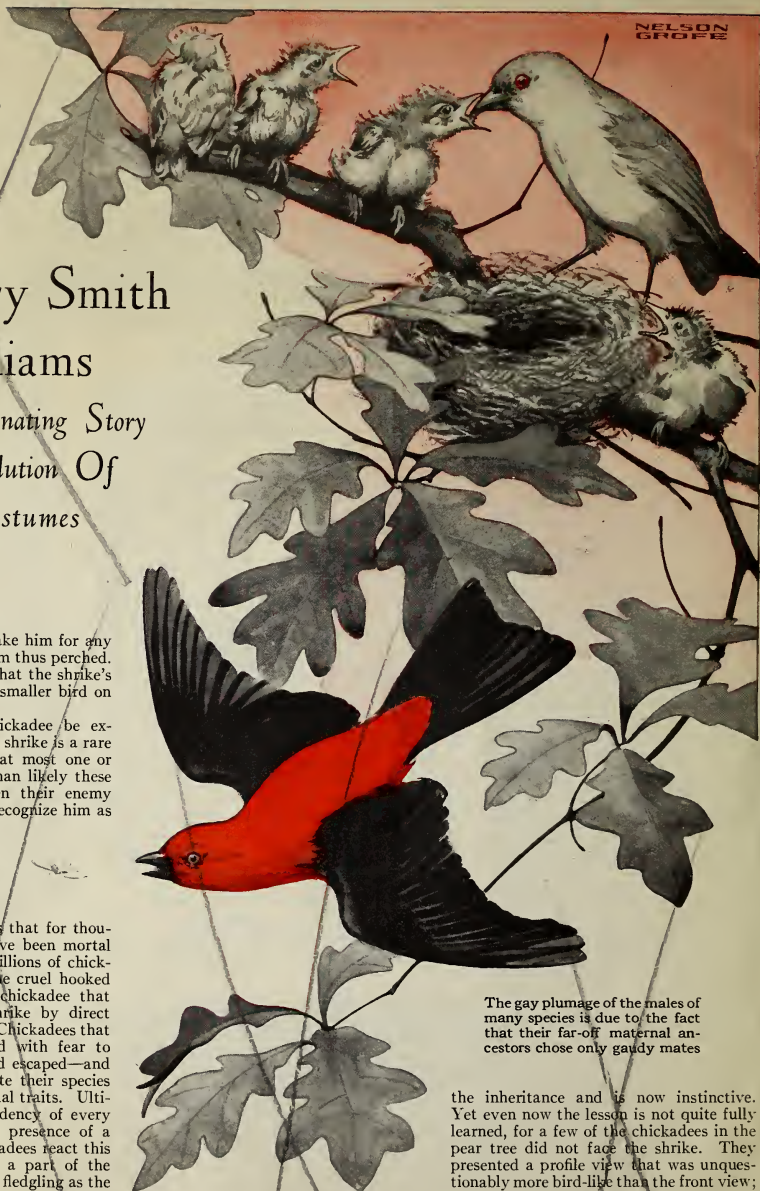
swered your question in advance," I said. "What we saw them do is in effect the resultant of millions of experiments, leading finally to the conclusion that the head-on view is the least conspicuous. Not a conscious conclusion, of course. No chickadee at any stage really knew anything about the matter, but in the long run the greater number of birds that chanced to face the enemy were preserved; and so the habit of facing the enemy became part of

The gay plumage of the males of many species is due to the fact that their far-off maternal ancestors chose only gaudy mates

the inheritance and is now instinctive. Yet even now the lesson is not quite fully learned, for a few of the chickadees in the pear tree did not face the shrike. They presented a profile view that was unquestionably more bird-like than the front view; and if we had not been here to frighten the shrike, probably one of the non-conformists would have paid the penalty."

Felicia considered the matter rather dubiously, watching the chickadees carefully meantime. Presently she nodded approval.

"I begin to see that Nature was right," she said. "When a chick directly faces us, there in the tree, he is less conspicuous than in side view. His black crown and throat seem no darker than branches of the tree; and the (Continued on page 282)



Helen Keller

(Continued from page 34)

into the library and find herself walking on newspapers—everywhere strewn about the floor, and she would find her father in his big chair, with a strange thing upon his nose and hooked over his ears, sitting with one of these great sheets of paper held before him. And though she put on the spectacles and held one of the sheets before her, she could not get any sensation from it, or any interest. Yet somehow there must be interest there—or her father would not do it so constantly.

She noticed, too, that other people kept moving their mouths when they were with each other, but she could not understand what they were doing, nor why. She tried to imitate them, but there was no result to that, either. She knew a push meant "go" and a pull meant "come," but these adults seemed to have some other signs which she could not fathom. Her hurt and baffled longing to be one with them culminated in terrific fits of temper, in which she screamed and cried in a frenzy—trying to free herself from her prison.

When she was six, her father took her to Baltimore to be examined by a famous oculist, in the hope that something could be done for her eyesight. It was a vain hope, but Dr. Chisholm advised Mr. Keller to go to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, in Washington, for information as to the possibilities of educating the child.

Dr. Bell was glad to help the child, and at his suggestion Mr. Keller wrote to the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, where Laura Bridgman had been so marvelously helped, asking if a teacher could be sent to Tuscombia for his little girl.

HELEN was almost seven when Miss Sullivan came to her—an active, well-formed child, full of life and energy, and with that gift for attracting affection which has remained with her always. She won her teacher's heart immediately—and then began the task which became the absorbing work of Miss Sullivan's life, the task of setting this child free.

She began with a doll, which she had brought for Helen from the Blind Institute. Laura Bridgman had dressed that doll—it was more than a doll; it was a message of hope. After Helen had played with it, Miss Sullivan spelled into her hand the letters d-o-l-l, and the child—as always, imitating—reproduced—not too well—the movements of her teacher's fingers. Miss Sullivan repeated the symbols slowly, and the child tried again. There was no consciousness in the imitation—merely the instinctive urge to copy what these people in the black world thought worth doing.

When she finally made the four signs to Miss Sullivan's satisfaction, Miss Sullivan patted Helen's shoulder and nodded her head in token of approval. The child ran to show her mother this new trick she had learned, still with no conception of its purpose.

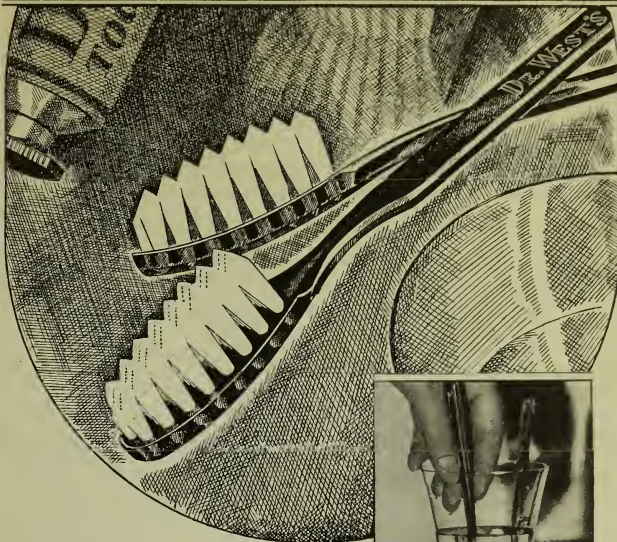
In the days that followed, she learned several more combinations of finger signals—still without connecting them with the objects they named.

One day Miss Sullivan tried to make her distinguish between the words "mug" and "water"—without success. Helen became tired and impatient as the new game was prolonged past the border lines of her interest and pleasure. Frantic with rage, she flew into one of her worst passions.

Patiently Miss Sullivan waited until the storm was over; then she brought the child's hat and took her hand. Helen loved to be outdoors, and went willingly at her side. Down in the garden some one was pumping water, and the teacher placed the child's hand in the cool stream, while she spelled into the other hand purposefully, impressively, arrestingly, "w-a-t-e-r—w-a-t-e-r—w-a-t-e-r—"

Like a miracle the connection was made—the spark was fired that has made Helen Keller one of the burning intellects of the day. She knew that the water flowing over her hand—

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LIST ITEMS HERE

(If more space is needed use another piece of paper)

Helen Keller

and those fingers moving in her other hand—were one thing—the same thing. Before night she had learned over thirty words . . .

That was the beginning. All things followed from that day. The child learned to read, her keen, active mind pleasuring itself in every task, assigned to it. Finally her teacher took her to Boston, to the Perkins Institute for the Blind—and there the child met other children who could spell to her as she spelled to them. At last she could exchange her thoughts and ideas with people of her own age. A new world opened before her.

In 1890, when Helen Keller was ten, she began to learn to speak. It was a task almost superhuman. She must learn merely from touching her teacher's lips and throat, and correct her mistakes by a mechanical change of her own lips and throat. She lacked not only hearing, but sight, to guide her. And she could not even judge her own success or failure.

If genius is the infinite capacity for taking pains—then Helen Keller's acquisition of speech is nothing short of genius. The labor, the endless discouragement, the hopes, the disappointments—the whole drama of success and failure must have occurred in that struggle. But when she came home and could speak to her mother—that mother who had never heard the name of "Mother" from her lips—still another abyss had been crossed.

In the years that have passed Helen Keller has even lectured—using words she knows only by their muscular contractions in her throat and lips, and by the control of her breath.

AS HER education progressed, Helen wanted above everything else to go to college. Some of her best friends dissuaded her, but after a year's delay she matriculated at Radcliffe, and in four years she completed her course and was graduated with her class.

This sounds like a simple statement. It was an achievement over almost insuperable difficulties. Every reference book must be spelled laboriously into her hand by Miss Sullivan, who almost lost her own eyesight in the long hours of night reading necessary to keep abreast of Helen's class. Perhaps Helen Keller and Miss Sullivan should be named as one of the twelve greatest women—they are as inseparable as Lindbergh's "We."

As soon as she was graduated, Helen began her work of trying to help others. Already, at the end of her sophomore year she had written "The Story of My Life," an epic of difficulties surmounted and of triumph in the face of failure. Now she began a campaign for one definite thing—to save eyesight to the thousands of babies infected at birth, by legislation ordering the safeguard against this infection to be applied as routine by all doctors or midwives.

In those days public sentiment was outraged by any public mention of a social evil. It was almost impossible to put before the people the horror of the facts and the simplicity of the remedy. Never once has Helen Keller faltered in what she thought was her duty. Due to her more than to any other person, legislation demanding precautionary treatment of the eyes of all babies is working in twenty-eight states.

Today work for the American Foundation for the Blind occupies a large part of Helen Keller's time, but she has done many other things as well. Lecture tours—vaudeville—the latest is to be a talking movie; she has already appeared in a silent one. Books appear constantly, books that exhibit a range of thought and appeal not narrowed in any way by the limitation of her senses. And if any one doubts that Helen Keller can form as true a judgment of a person as himself, let him turn to her impression of Mark Twain in "Midstream."

All my life I have been a Mark Twain fan. I have read everything he has ever written. I have read every book I have heard of that has been published about him, and I found

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Helen Keller

Helen Keller's portrait of him more vivid, more atmospheric, than any other I have ever seen.

Friends—Helen Keller has had many of them—and among the great of the earth. Her mind meets theirs at ease, on the same plane. And there are other joys of life which she not only shares with us, but perhaps rivals us in appreciating.

Flowers, for instance. She loves them—has loved them from her babyhood. She can tell them, of course, by their odor and by their outline. I wish you could have seen the movement of her hands as she spoke of lilies of the valley—the outward, upward sweep of two spreading green leaves, the delicate touch of the descending fingers as if they rang little white bells. I had never before thought of the touch of flowers, of their exquisite, sculptured outlines. Here is a joy Helen Keller has had for years, a joy of her very own.

And then her dogs. Great Dane and Scottie, she loves them both alike. They come close to her. They understand her when she speaks to them. They lay a head upon her knee and look at her in mute devotion. How could she not understand? She loves to be outdoors with them—likes to walk with them, and to feel their wild plunges as they dash off over the meadows and then come back to her side.

One outstanding characteristic of Helen Keller is her amazing courage. She fears nothing. She rides horseback, and delights in it. She has been up in a plane—and loved the rushing, soaring sensation. She swims—she floats—most appalling of all to a timid soul with eyesight, she dives. To me that is the bravest thing I have ever known. She does not merely jump off into deep water, holding her nose with one hand. She dives—a splendid, curving forward dive. She can swim under water, too, she told me. She goes out with a long, strong cord tied to her belt, so that she can frolic and play at ease—and then the way back to shore.

SHE often speaks of color. I asked her what colors meant to her—red—white—blue.

She put both hands to her cheeks in a charming gesture. "Red is warm," she said. "As when my face flushes from embarrassment or pleasure. Pink is smooth and exquisite—like the cheek of a little child. Blue is the curve of the sky above me. White is intense excitement—spiritual or intellectual—and white is also the cool, calm peace of snow in winter, when the hills and fields are still and waiting. Green—I always think of green as the way my garden smells with the fresh dew of early morning on the grass—or after a shower when the flowers and trees are cool and sweet with rain-drops. Lilac—lilac is a caress from a loved hand. Purple—purple is the mystery of far-off hills—no one can ever quite say what purple is."

Could you better it—you of the seeing eyes? Which will you have—so many shades of red and white to make a pink—or just the color of a baby's cheek? If we have the accurate composition of colors, Helen Keller has the ultimate result of them, their essential spirit.

One thing more she has, in measure granted to few on this earth—a religious vision that transcends many times that of ordinary mortals engrossed with the world about them. Her faith to her is the supreme fact of existence. Her book, "My Religion," is a testimonial of faith that flamed through the blackest hours her life has ever known. Let her speak to you in her own words what Divinity means to her—It would almost be worth a life of black silence to have one's soul irradiated by a consciousness like this:

"As I wander through the dark, encountering difficulties, I am aware of encouraging voices that murmur from the spirit realm. I sense a holy passion pouring down from the springs of Infinity. I thrill to music that beats with the pulses of God. Bound to suns and planets by invisible cords, I feel the flame of



Through the moonlight ~down a path of coral sand

worried thought. Let go... they whisper. Forget...

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are YOU trying to entertain in a home that doesn't look the part?

Has it seemed to you lately that your friends aren't enjoying their visits as they used to? Have your dinners and bridge parties begun to lose some of their old gaiety and sparkle? Then it's time to look around your house—critically, as you would a stranger's. If your walls and woodwork have become drab, if your furniture is scratched and dull, if your floors are scarred and lusterless, you have the answer without looking farther. You've simply forgotten how sensitive people are to surroundings. Who can be gay in a cheerless room?

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April 1931 Good Housekeeping



Look
around your
home—your
guests do! . . .
Then
Kyanize.

Helen Keller

eternity in my soul. Here in the midst of the every-day air, I sense the rush of ethereal rains. I am conscious of the splendor that binds all things of earth to all things of heaven—immured by silence and darkness. I possess the light which shall give me vision a thousand fold when death sets me free."

Perhaps, after all, that is the greatest thing about Helen Keller—greater even than her literary achievements; greater than her work for those who walk in darkness; greater than her power of speech: That she has accepted life as it has been meted out to her, not with bitterness, not even with pallid resignation—but joyfully and thankfully, as a gift from Someone she loves and trusts.

(Next month, Grace Abbott)

Wiring for Comfort

(Continued from page 91)

should of course, be laid out in accordance with the lighting scheme, whether this provides for a central fixture, side lights, or the newer cove lighting with its interesting possibilities. Do not forget outlets for the vacuum cleaner and floor polisher.

The major wiring problem in the living room concerns lighting. Here, as in the dining room, the location of the lighting fixture outlets will be determined by the lighting and decorative schemes. But portable lamps and lighted ornaments which are becoming increasingly popular for providing interesting spots of light or color will require convenience outlets. The adequacy of the wiring will be judged by its ability to take care of any placement of furniture.

Every home-maker will appreciate the need for a generous number of outlets in the living room. Even the mantel now needs an outlet for the electric clock or, in some cases, for candles or lights. And the fireplace itself may need an outlet for one of those interesting "coal" grates with the flickering fire effect furnished by an electric lamp with a revolving disc on its top. Of course there is an outlet for the radio!

Bedrooms and dressing rooms need sufficient light at the bureau and dressing table. This is usually furnished by drop lights or side wall brackets properly located to eliminate deep shadows and to give light to the person dressing. Of course, too, general illumination is necessary, and outlets for portable lamps. For those who enjoy reading in bed particular attention should be given to suitable lighting that will be kind to the eyes. The appliances for which wiring should be considered in the bedroom are the curling iron, vibrator, warming pad, room heater, and bottle warmer.

To relieve the chill in the bathroom an electric heater answers a real need. But for safety's sake it should be built in permanently, and the proper wiring provided. Lights at the sides of the mirror are appreciated by the shaver. And also, for the sake of safety, have a wall switch for the lights instead of individual switches on the fixtures themselves.

It should be evident that every room in the house has its own problems as far as wiring is concerned and must be given individual consideration. With appreciation of this it should be possible to have your new home wired to suit your own conditions or to have the wiring in your present home made adequate as you desire it.

"Playing Safe,"

A Delightful New Short Story

by

Violette Kimball Dunn,

Will Appear

In May



Helen Keller

PORTRAIT BY LEON GORDON

The Decision on the Civil War was Reverse

By JAY
GELZER

Illustrated by
T. D. Skidmore



LITTLE ANN, who had been Little Ann when her mother was Ann and her grandmother was Ann and for a very little while even her great grandmother was Ann, and who was still Little Ann though she was no longer Little Ann really, stopped beside the statue of "The Confederate Soldier" on her way across the Battery to work.

Just here, in the days when Charleston was young, the home of one of the early Beauforts had stood, and down below, where a freighter was steaming in past Fort Sumter to dock, leaving a trail of smoke spreading darkly behind, her ancestor's sailing vessels had arrived from his extensive plantations in Bermuda.

Watching the freighter, Little Ann saw instead of a boat bringing oranges and lemons from Florida other boats bringing other cargoes: Sugar. Coffee. Spices. Fine stuff for fine dresses for the fine ladies of the family. Boxes of sweets decorated with perforated paper. Plantation hands from Bermuda to be developed into house servants.

She knew all about the cargoes of the sailing vessels. Knew, too, about the burning of the house which had once stood where there was now a park, and the removal of the Beaufort family to Meeting Street.

The Meeting Street house was still standing. If she went a little out of her way—and she had already come a little out of her way to walk across the Battery—she could pass the house on Meeting Street, although that, perhaps, was silly in that the house no longer belonged to her family; even sillier than walking across the Battery, where she could at least pretend that she walked because she liked the view of the ocean and not because of the house which had once stood there.

She did like the view. In the distance was the ferry which went over to Sullivan's Island, where she had spent much happy time with all the bare-legged little cousins now widely scattered. Above the ferry was the spiderweb of steel bridge which also went to Sullivan's Island, challenging the slowness of the dingy little ferry boat.

"I'll always go over to Sullivan's Island by the ferry!" thought Little Ann loyally, and then, because time was passing, and because if she wanted to pass the house on Meeting Street she must hurry, she did not

pause before the bronze tablet which displayed the immobile countenance of another of her ancestors.

The ancestor on the tablet did not approve of her. Little Ann always felt certain that when she paused before him, the bronze countenance frowned, and was reduced by that frown to the level of apology because she knew so well why her ancestor frowned.

In his day ladies were ladies and did not pass on foot and unattended on the way to work, but things had been far less complicated then.

Walking along in sunshine which was



